

This guidance sheet has been compiled with assistance from The Carlisle Diocesan Stewardship team, based on feedback and information from the National Stewardship Network and work carried out in Canterbury Diocese.

“With the increasing costs of repairing and maintaining our historic churches many parishes are exploring the idea of setting up a Friends Scheme. Such a scheme can enable a wider group of people help share the burden of ensuring that their parish church building is in a reasonable state to hand on to the next generation.

“Many people have a great deal of good will towards their church building, especially in rural areas and although they may not wish to contribute to the religious aspects of the church. They may be willing to support part of their heritage. A Friends Scheme is one way in which a parish church can encourage help of this kind from a wider community”

A Friends Scheme for A Parish Church – Canterbury Diocese 2003

Planning a 'Friends Group' structure

When a Parochial Church Council (PCC), Priest and Churchwarden decide to establish a Friends group, they must first make sure they will be able to attract new people who can make a positive contribution.

The new people should be in addition to the PCC members, although some may wish to join. Activities organised by the Friends group should not be a burden; the priest and his/her family should not be expected to attend every event.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Friends group needs to be made clear in the constitution. Its managing body can have representation on the PCC but the PCC cannot delegate any powers to the group.

The function of the Friends group is not to provide funds for general housekeeping. The care, maintenance, repair, and insurance of the church remain the responsibility of the PCC. All work done to the church is still subject to faculty jurisdiction and additional permissions may be required where the use of any part of the property changes.

Role of the Friends Group

The role of the Friends Group is essentially to promote knowledge and understanding of the church, its role in the Christian faith and the surrounding community.

For example, the Friends group might provide additional facilities to accommodate this work or provide interpretation or guides for visitors.

Why set up a 'Friends of Church' group?

- Help raise funds to meet the increasing costs of maintaining church buildings
- Opportunity for those not involved in the religious aspects of the church, to support the building

Types of Friends Groups

- Parochial Church Council (PCC) sub-committee
- Independent group with its own constitution

Charity Commission

- When is it necessary to register as a charity?
- The benefits of charitable status

Types of Friends Groups

Sub-committee of PCC

The simplest scheme to establish and operate. The committee organises the events, has its own membership list and reports to the PCC.

Advantages:

- Under full authority of the PCC
- Charity status as part of the PCC
- Tax efficient donations and subscriptions through Gift Aid.
- No separate constitution or AGM required.
- Can use the church's CBF Investment Fund
- Can co-opt anyone to serve on the committee.
- Events and personnel may be covered by PCC insurance.

Disadvantages:

- Wider membership, particularly leadership, may be difficult to attract if it perceived as a sub-committee.
- Additional work for the PCC members who serve on the committee.
- Has no executive powers.

Independent group with its own constitution

Advantages:

- May attract wider community support.
- Seen as distinct from the religious activity of the church.
- Possibly easier to find a 'patron'.
- Organisation does not fall on existing church members.
- Tax efficient donations through Gift Aid.

Disadvantages:

- Takes longer to establish.
- Requires its own constitution, AGM, bank accounts and officers.
- Must register with Charity Commission when income exceeds £5,000 (under review, may increase)

- Procedures for reporting and submitting accounts dictated by the Charity Commission.
- The committee are the trustees and have personal liabilities and responsibilities.
- Need to separately insure its activities.
- Activities may fall out of PCC control.
- Can be divorced from the core purpose of the building.

Friends of Tebay Church

Structure: Came together independently of the PCC, although they have close links and members of the PCC are on the committee.

Aims: To maintain the fabric of the building, to encourage wider use of the building by the community, by developing the vestry.

Activity: Refurbished vestry for Community use; provided kitchen and toilet facilities; and provided church heritage guide.

Friends of St Oswald's Church

Structure: Registered Charity (no. 1142078)

Aims: Preserve, restore, maintain and repair the internal and external fabric of St Oswald's Church (Ravenstonedale) for the benefit of the arts, culture and heritage, for the benefit of the public.

Activity: Toilet and kitchen facilities planned.

More information:

Churches Trust for Cumbria: www.ctfc.org.uk
Email: info@ctfc.org.uk Tel: 07501469373

Parish Resources: www.parishresources.org.uk
Contact: Geoffrey Hine
Email: ghine@carlisle-diocese.org.uk

The Arthur Rank Centre has information on supporting churches and the use of church buildings: www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/publications-and-resources/rural-church-buildings#index

For more information please contact us at ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, Offices O-Q, Skirsgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA
T: 01228 817224 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk | Follow us @ACTCumbria
Registered in England as Voluntary Action Cumbria | Charity Registration Number 1080875 | Company Number 3957858

©ACT 2013. This publication may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as ACTion with Communities in Cumbria copyright and the title of the publication specified.

This publication has been funded by the Rural Development Programme for England



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas

